



Focus

Motor Vehicle Emission Check Program

Diesel, Heavy Duty, and Fleet Vehicles

Background

Motor vehicles are Washington's largest air pollution source. Urban areas of Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane counties exceed federal health-based standards for carbon monoxide air pollution, mainly because of motor vehicle emissions.

The motor vehicle Emission Check Program identifies vehicles with exhaust emissions that exceed state standards so that they can be properly repaired. For several years, the Emission Check Program was directed mainly at gasoline-powered vehicles in the Spokane and Seattle areas. The programs now includes diesel vehicles in metropolitan areas of Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Spokane counties. Most aspects of the program are the same for gasoline and diesel vehicles.

Which vehicles need an emission check, and when?

The Emission Check Program applies to cars, trucks, and buses registered in emission testing areas that are more than five and less than 25 years old. Vehicles are tested every other year. Vehicle owners are notified on their license tab renewal notice when their vehicle needs a test.

A vehicle purchased from a private party must have a valid inspection certificate before the registration can be transferred to a new owner located inside an emission check area. This does not apply to vehicles purchased from a Washington State dealer. Dealers must provide buyers with a written statement that the vehicle may or may not pass its next scheduled emission check.

The diesel emission check

Because diesels produce a different mixture of emissions, the emission check for diesel vehicles is different from that for gasoline-powered vehicles. Diesel vehicles are checked for opacity – the density of the exhaust smoke – using a “snap idle” test. This test shows the concentration of fine particles in the exhaust. These particles, which give diesel exhaust its color, can be deeply inhaled and can cause lung damage over time. Less smoke means less pollutant particles are being emitted.

During the test, an opacity meter is connected to the exhaust pipe. In neutral, the accelerator is fully depressed and released. The meter automatically takes the highest reading. The vehicle must pass three snap idle sequences in a row. Up to ten tries are allowed. The opacity limit depends on the model year of the vehicle: through 1991 = 60 percent; newer vehicles = 40 percent.

Self-testing for diesel heavy duty and fleet vehicles

Although all vehicles needing emission checks may be tested at an emission check station, this can pose problems for heavy duty vehicles and fleets, especially if time spent on a trip to an emission check station interferes with business. In addition, large vehicles can inconvenience other motorists by occupying a great deal of space at the emission check station.

A self-check program is available to operators of fleet licensed vehicles and operators of one or more diesel-powered vehicles over 8,500 pounds gross weight rating. To participate in this program, operators of these vehicles must meet the following requirements:

Authorized self-check facilities

An authorized self-check facility must employ an Ecology Authorized Fleet Diesel Emission Specialist and have a properly functioning opacity meter that meets Ecology's specifications.

Ecology field staff spot check self-check facilities to ensure that authorized specialists are performing the inspections and that the proper equipment is used.

To become an authorized specialist, technicians need to obtain an Ecology certificate by attending a training session and passing an exam. Special sessions and certificate endorsements for diesel specialists and fleet technicians are required.

Operators of heavy duty and fleet diesel vehicles may participate in the self-check program in the following ways:

- own an Ecology-approved opacity meter and employ an Ecology Authorized diesel/fleet emission specialist; or
- hire a facility or mobile tester approved by Ecology to conduct diesel fleet and heavy-duty "self" testing.

Pre-paid emission check certificates

Registered self-check facilities must purchase fleet check forms from Ecology. Books of 25 forms are available for \$375 from the Department of Ecology, Cashiering Section, P.O. Box 5128, Lacey, WA 98503-5128. When ordering forms, be sure to note on your check or money order that you are requesting forms for the diesel program.

When checking a vehicle, note the readings but do not record them on the form. If the vehicle passes the check, complete, sign, and date the form. If the vehicle fails the check, repair and retest. There is no waiver for self-tested vehicles.

The fleet inspection certificate is valid for one calendar year (January 1 – December 31).

For more information

For general information about the Emission Check Program, call 1-800-272-3780. For information on the diesel self-check program, contact:

Kevin Hancock	Clark County	(360) 690-7165
David Adler	King/Snohomish counties	(425) 649-7267
Art Betts	Pierce County	(360) 407-0244
John Poffenroth	Spokane County	(509) 456-3283

If you have special accommodation needs or require this document in alternative format, please call Judy Beitel at (360) 407-6878 (voice); or call (360) 407-6006 (TDD only).